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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000949

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [SCUL](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: STUDENTS UNITE AROUND INELIGIBLE CANDIDATES

REF: A. CARACAS 00856
[1](#)B. CARACAS 00840
[1](#)C. CARACAS 00812

CARACAS 00000949 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR DANIEL LAWTON
FOR REASON 1.4 (D)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. In recent weeks the student movement has taken up the cause of the ineligible candidates ("inhabilitados") in an effort to garner increased national and international attention to the issue. The move has also helped re-energize the disjointed student movement whose leaders have largely focused on diverse political and sometimes personal agendas. Yon Goicoechea and Freddy Guevara have carried out small public awareness campaigns in support of the sanctioned candidates, and have announced a march to the Supreme Court (TSJ) on July 12. Administrative rulings by the Comptroller's Office have made more than 300 persons, mostly opposition, ineligible to hold or run for public office in the November state and local elections. The student movement, although less visible than it was a year ago, still commands high levels of public confidence, and could be key to securing greater attention to the sanctioned politicians. END SUMMARY.

The Right to Choose

[1](#)2. (SBU) The university student movement, which has assumed a lower profile since the December 2007 constitutional referendum, has recently made public its support for the ineligible candidates via small demonstrations and public awareness campaigns. This renewed activism has also helped unite the fragmented movement under a common cause. Yon Goicoechea and Freddy Guevara, both graduates from the Andres Bello Catholic University (UCAB) and leaders of the Radio Caracas Television (RCTV) marches in 2007, are spearheading the campaign. Goicoechea submitted a motion to stay Comptroller Russian's administrative sanctions to the TSJ on June 17, saying the sanctions restrict voters' right to elect candidates of their choosing. He charged Russian with "exceeding his authority", and altering the rules of democracy to the government's benefit.

[1](#)3. (SBU) A week later, Guevara, Goicoechea, and university students organized a small demonstration that included a large banner reading "Don't Take Away My Right to Vote" in a downtown Caracas plaza. Guevara called on Venezuelans to take greater interest in the issue, arguing the fate of the ineligible candidates affects citizens' right to choose. To showcase the movement's interest in this issue, a

demonstration is planned to the TSJ on July 12. Some of the opposition's leading candidates, including Caracas mayoral candidate Leopoldo Lopez and Miranda state gubernatorial candidate Enrique Mendoza are among the ineligible candidates.

Comptroller Upholds Sanctions

¶4. (C) Meanwhile, Russian has staunchly defended the sanctions in television and print interviews, and warned that more bans are likely in the coming weeks. The Venezuelan constitution, however, stipulates that a person cannot be stripped of political rights unless convicted of a crime and sentenced. The ineligible candidates are banned from pursuing public office based on administrative sanctions and have not been able to contest their cases in front of a judge. TSJ Vice President of the Electoral Chamber Luis Martinez Hernandez told Poloff that the court will likely rule on the constitutionality of the Comptroller's sanctions by mid-July. Separately, opposition parties and civil organizations are pressuring the Comptroller's Office to update Russian's list because the ineligibility period for some individuals has passed but they remain sanctioned.

¶5. (C) COMMENT: The students' support for the ineligible candidates and their efforts to frame this as a right to vote issue as well as a constitutional matter is significant given the opposition's lack-luster attempts to draw attention to this matter. Further, the student movement still commands high levels of public confidence and could help secure wider public support for the blacklisted politicians as well as for other opposition candidacies. Opposition leaders claim that recent polls show that as many as 80 percent of Venezuelans disagree with the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela's (BRV's)

CARACAS 00000949 002.2 OF 002

decision to declare more than 300 politicians ineligible to run. At the same time, they concede that this issue does not yet resonate sufficiently with voters to inspire large street protests. END COMMENT.

DUDDY